UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* UN reports world economy expected to grow 3 per cent in 1996; expresses concern at labour conditions in developed countries and says development assistance for poor countries endangered.

* Secretary-General attends ceremony in Paris to commemorate death of former French President Francois Mitterrand.

* Member States owe United Nations nearly $2.3 billion as of 31 December 1995; $564 billion to regular budget and $1.7 billion to peace-keeping.

* U.S. Ambassador Madeleine Albright says proposed force for Eastern Slavonia could receive IFOR backup and close air support if needed.

* High Commissioner on Human Rights holds emergency meeting on financing of field operations in Rwanda.

* Angolan Government begins quartering forces; UNITA agrees to new timetable to quarter its troops and to stop propaganda broadcasts.

* DPI Assistant Secretary-General tells seminar on Arab media right to information and freedom of expression basic prerequisites for socio-economic development and political freedom.

* Committee on the Rights of the Child begins eleventh session in Geneva; to hear reports from seven countries.

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The world economy will attain a cruising speed of 3 per cent annual growth in 1996, up from 2.6 per cent last year, according to the half-year update of the United Nations "World Economic and Social Survey". World trade grew almost 10 per cent in 1995 for a second year of very rapid growth, with strong demand in developed countries and the Asia/Pacific region. The update was issued today by the Department of Economic and Social Information Policy Analysis (DESIPA).

(more)

For information media—not an official record

Output growth in developed countries slowed last year and is expected to remain at 2.5 per cent as policy makers keep inflation low and focus on budget deficits. Developing economies grew 5 per cent last year and this year's outlook was 5.5 per cent. Central and Eastern Europe did better than expected last year and transition economies were on track for their first year of overall growth in 1996.

However, current labour market conditions in developed countries were an economic and social concern with little growth in real wages. High unemployment was making consumers cautious and holding back economic growth. While inter-governmental financial support prevented the devaluation of the Mexican peso from becoming a world financial crisis, official assistance for poor countries was endangered.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was in Paris today to attend the official ceremony commemorating the death of former French President, Francois Mitterrand at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, a United Nations spokesman said. Later, he went to a lunch hosted by President Jacques Chirac and this evening he will meet with the French foreign minister. The Secretary-General will have a formal meeting with President Chirac, before returning to London to chair the talks on East Timor.

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The United Nations is owed a total of nearly $2.3 billion in assessed contributions as of 31 December 1995, according to the latest update on the Organization's financial situation. Of that amount, $564 billion was for assessments for the regular budget and $1.7 billion was for peace-keeping operations. The figure for peacekeeping included assessments totalling $14.6 million within the 30-day due period.

Sweden, the thirteenth largest contributor to the United Nations, was the first Member State to pay its full assessment for the 1996 regular budget, a United Nations spokesman said. Currently, 91 countries were in arrears on their 1995 contributions. Iraq, along with about 20 other countries, came under Article 19 of the Charter and lost voting privileges in the General Assembly last year.

Article 19 states that a Member whose financial contributions are in arrears cannot vote in the Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from the proceeding two years. However, the Assembly can permit Members to vote if they are in arrears for more than two years because of circumstances beyond their control.

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Security Council consultations to create the authority for the transitional administration in Eastern Slavonia and for an initial force of 5,000 troops to implement provisions of the Dayton peace agreement were progressing well, according to United States Ambassador Madeleine Albright. Speaking to correspondents today, she said the force, which would be known as the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baraja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES), would replace the United Nations Confidence Restoration Operation in Croatia (UNCRO) whose mandate expires 15 January.

Ambassador Albright said there was general agreement in the Council that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) - led Implementation Force (IFOR) should provide close air support and withdrawal capability for UNTAES if necessary. She noted that the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, General Jacques Klein, had reported the force's nature and relationship to IFOR was more important than its strength, and it could number 5,000 if it was credible and well constituted.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala Lasso, has held an emergency meeting in Geneva to discuss financial difficulties facing human rights field operations in Rwanda. The operations, funded by voluntary contributions, were established with a $3 million advance from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund in October 1994. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs has informed the High Commissioner that $1.5 million must be repaid by end of March. Unless additional funds are generated, field operations in Rwanda could be terminated by the end of January.

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The Angolan Government began quartering personnel from its rapid reaction police at a formal ceremony in the capital of Luanda yesterday, according to a United Nations spokesman. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), has agreed to resume moving its troops into quartering camps under a new timetable.

The quartering of troops, which is expected to be completed in three provinces by 20 January, has encountered many delays and difficulties, the spokesman said. To date, six out of the eight quartering sites needed have been built. Under a new plan, Government troops will be withdrawn to their barracks and UNITA has agreed to end propaganda on its radio broadcasts. Senior UNITA officials will begin arriving in Luanda in the next 24 hours.

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During its fiftieth anniversary year, the United Nations had reaffirmed its commitment to press freedom, pluralism and the dignity of journalists and writers, Assistant Secretary-General for Public Information Samir Sanbar has told a seminar to promote an independent and pluralistic Arab media. The five-day seminar, which will end tomorrow in San'a, Yemen reviewed such issues as public service media, censorship and self-censorship, and strengthening professional training.

Speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sanbar said that the media had contributed to the current decisive period in the economic, social and cultural development of the Arab region. The right to information and freedom of expression were basic prerequisites for socio-economic development and political freedom. Citing the assassination of over 70 journalists last year -- more than 30 in Algeria alone -- he said attacks on media and the killing of journalists could not be tolerated.

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A plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been sent to the State parties by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala-Lasso. In his opening address to the eleventh session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva this week, Mr. Ayala-Lasso said he envisaged a strategy for developing inter-agency cooperation and with sufficient mobilization, the plan should soon be operational.

The Committee of independent experts will examine seven country reports as well as administrative, legislative and judicial measures by States parties to advance the rights of the child. Mr. Ayala-Lasso said that at its last session, the General Assembly invited States parties to ensure the education of the child in accordance with article 29 of the Convention. It also expressed support for expert studies on children affected by armed conflicts and for the Special Rapporteur's work on the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography.

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